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ABSTRACT

Creative reading of fiction is defined in this paper as the unique addition by readers, in their imaginations, to the author's plot, setting, and characterization. The test for the creative reading of fiction, described in this paper, contains three parts (each an incomplete narrative) for determining how creatively readers can complete undeveloped details in print, develop narration in their imaginations after reaching a significant turning point in the plot, and interject themselves into the circumstances of the characters and the events in the narration. A total of 244 high school English students from four grade levels, who rated average and above average in intelligence and grade average, completed the test. The opinions of five judges (two psychology professors and three high school reading and literature specialists), the comparisons of test results with two of Torrence's tests of creativity, and the reliability coefficient show the test to be a reasonably valid test of creative reading of fiction. (JM)

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A TEST TO EVALUATE CREATIVE READING OF FICTION AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

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A basic strength of an enlightened people is that each individual is encouraged to contribute to his society by his own creative powers. Yet, many educators believe that current educational methods tend to stamp out creativity in our students by the time they enter their sixth year of school.

Most authorities in the field of reading acknowledge a process called creative reading. If there is such a process, reading authorities certainly must accept the responsibility of enhancing students' creative powers through creative reading. Yet, can creative reading

be taught? Can creative reading skills be measured?

This paper will present a description of a creative reading test of fiction at the high school level. The writers are developing the test with the hope that it might be useful to researchers and educators for the investigation of many problems. The test might be used for the testing of instructional methods for creative reading at the high school level. It might be used to investigate the relationships between creative reading and other levels of reading comprehension. It might be used to determine the relationships between creative reading and intelligence. Perhaps it might be used to determine the relationships between creative reading and psychological factors such as student types, teacher types, and the like. Or perhaps it might be used to determine the relationships between creative reading and philosophical factors such as the points of view of a school or of a community.

Definitions of Creative Reading

Most authorities concur that a creative act is both unique and productive. In the light of this concept and based on a review of the literature, the writers of this paper define the creative reading act as the unique contribution by the reader in his imagination to the author's discourse in print. The creative reading act is based

on the reader's personal and vicarious experiences and the product of creative reading is the reader's resulting pleasure and enhanced understanding of his personal universe.

Creative reading is applicable not only to fiction but to other subject areas as well. For example, a creative reader of mathematics could conceive of original alternatives for solving problems. A creative reader of science could conceive of alternative hypotheses or resolutions of problems than those advanced by the author.

The writers of this paper specifically define creative reading of fiction as the unique addition by the reader in his imagination to the author's plot, setting and characterizations.

Some examples of creative reading of fiction activities are: (1) imagining the development of details beyond what the author has written, (2) imagining a development of narration after a significant turning point in the plot, (3) imagining settings beyond those developed by the author, (4) imagining motivations of the characters beyond those developed by the author, (5) imagining the relationships among characters beyond those developed by the author, (6) imagining of the reader, himself, as a participant in the circumstances of the characters and events portrayed by the author.

Description of the Creative Reading of Fiction Test

The Creative Reading of Fiction Test has three parts. Each part is an incomplete narrative. Part One is about two brothers visiting a great grandmother in a house which is also inhabited by a supernatural force called Neecodam. The selection is written to represent science fiction and it is one and a half pages in length. Five of the sentences, each highly emotive, are incomplete. The reader's task is to complete each sentence in as many unique ways as he can. The purpose for Part One of the test is to sample how creatively the reader can complete undeveloped details in print.

Part Two is about a college girl who must remain behind for Christmas in a dormitory because she cannot afford to go home. Then during her second afternoon alone, someone or something suddenly comes to her door. The selection is written to represent a mystery story. The story is divided into three parts, each about a page in length. Each section breaks off at a highly emotive moment. The reader's task after reading each section is to list all the things he can imagine that might happen next. The purpose for Part Two is to sample how creatively the reader can develop narration in his imagination after he reaches a significant turning point in the plot.

In Part Three the reader is introduced to seven characters who are snowbound at a roadside tavern. The characters include a high school dropout with a guitar, a young mother and daughter, a wealthy older man traveling with a young lady, a college girl who lives on a farm and is studying to be a veterinarian, and two teenage brothers who appear to be in trouble with the law. Each character is portrayed as a person with an unidentified problem. The selection is written to represent high drama or romance and is three pages in length.

The reader has three tasks on this part of the test. First, he must list all the sad events he can imagine which might have happened to each of these characters prior to their meeting. The purpose for this task is to sample how creatively the reader can imagine motivations for characters in narration.

The second task of the reader in Part Three is to list how some of these characters, now that they have met, might influence one another. The purpose for this task is to sample how creatively the reader can imagine relationships among characters in narration beyond those developed by the author.

The third task of the reader in Part Three is to imagine that he also is snowbound with the characters in the story. The reader then lists all the things he might

do to influence some of the characters. The purpose for this task is to sample how creatively the reader can interject himself into the circumstances of characters and events in narration.

The test consists of two booklets, one a Test Booklet containing the selections, the other an Answer Booklet in which the student records his responses.

Sample of Subjects Used for the Test

The sample of subjects for the test were middle class high school students in a suburb northwest of Chicago. The subjects were average and above average students both in intelligence and in academic performance. For the final testing, two classes of freshmen, two classes of sophomores, three classes of juniors, and two classes of seniors were included, for a total sample of 244. All subjects were students in English. The test was administered by the writers with the cooperation of the classroom teachers.

Grading of the Test

A basic problem in designing this kind of an evaluating instrument is to devise a quantitative grading system that is as objective as possible. Complete objectivity, of course, is impossible. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. The number of responses is unlimited. Each response must be judged by the grader as to whether

it is or is not creative. Consequently, criteria were drawn up to guide the graders. From a validation sample of forty students, graders using the criteria as a guide had an inter-grader agreement that was significant at the .01 level.

Specifically, the graders were directed to award two points for each creative response. A creative response was defined as one which is a definite addition by the reader to the story. The response must be a concept or event which is more than what the author would be expected to say next. It must be developed, clear, and out of the commonplace.

A response not creative enough to earn points has one or more of the following weaknesses: (1) undeveloped-in other words incomplete; not explicit; (2) too common-in other words unimaginative; expected; (3) too vague-in other words not clear; not specific; (4) repetitious-in other words a repeating of a response which has earned points; a "spin-off" of a previous response without any added development.

In an extensive creative response, for every additional "creative touch" an extra point is added. An extra point can also be awarded for a "spin-off" of an idea previously stated, if it contains an added development.

Examples of Non-Creative and Creative Responses

In Part Two of the test the reader is introduced to Thelma, a college student who is left alone in the dormitory for Christmas. Thelma's family lives in Venezuela and her parents cannot afford to bring her home. On the second afternoon of her lonely holiday, Thelma attempts to pass the time reading, when suddenly there is someone or something at her door.

The reader now must list all the things that he imagines might happen next.

Samples of responses considered non-creative are:

"A telegraph boy comes to the door bringing her money from her family to go home."

"Her roommate comes back to invite her home for Christmas."

"A small cat comes in the door to keep her company."

All such responses would receive the score of zero because they have one or more of the above mentioned weaknesses.

The following is an example of a response for Part Two considered to be highly creative. It was written by a high school freshman.

"Super Talker comes in and asks why she is not home and she tells him. He felt sorry and started talking to her and for a little time she forgot she was

not home. But then she started to cry and then she found that now with her were three little people in green and white coats and sparkling. They asked what she was crying about and she told them. Then they said,

'You'll get the money by the end of the day
But in the oddest way!'

Two hours later something hit the door. It was a little dog and around his neck he had hundred dollar bills rade into a collar. And there was a note that said take this money and the dog and go home."

This response received a grade of five--two points for "Super Talker," one additional point for the three little people in green and white coats, another additional point for the rhymes "day" and "way," and a final additional point for the dog collar.

Statistical Analysis of the Test

Two methods to determine an estimate of the validity of the test were attempted. First, the test was submitted to five judges, two who are professors of psychology who have done work in the area of creativity, and three who are high school reading specialists with majors in literature. Each judge considered the test to be an instrument to evaluate creative reading. All made valuable suggestions for the rewriting of the test. One judge thought that the selections were too simplistic and that the works

from great authors should have been used instead, the other judges, however, agree with the writers of the test that the selections should be especially written to guarantee that the selections are easy both in language (fourth grade reading level) and in concepts so as to negate as much as possible the factor of reading comprehension.

The second method to determine an estimate of the validity of the test was to compare it's results to the same students' sample with two of Torrance's tests of creativity. The tests used were (1) Sounds and Images and (2) Sounds and onomatopeia. With the Sounds and Images test the correlation was re=.31 which was significant at the .01 level of confidence. Also with the Sounds and Onomatopeia test the correlation was r=.31 which was also significant at the .01 level of confidence. In the light of the highly subjective nature of the tests concerned, the authors were satisfied with these correlations and assume from these data that the characteristic in common of the three tests is the factor of creativity.

To determine the reliability of the test, a split-half comparison of the responses of forty subjects chosen at random was made. A reliability coefficient of .76 was found. Therefore, in the light of these results and considering the elusiveness of objectivity with this kind of instrument the writers believe the test to be reliable.

In the light of the opinions of these judges, the comparisons of torrence's tests of creativity, and the reliability coefficient, the writers believe the test to be reasonably valid as a test of creative reading of fiction.

Concluding Statement

Is the promotion of creativity a viable educational goal? Certainly! American ingenuity--a characteristic instilled into our society because of the experiences of the lonely settlers on the American frontier--has transformed the world. Indeed, "Yankee know-how" has put footprints on the moon! Other great cultures also continue to break new paths to the frontiers of human imagination. Certainly, therefore, is it not the responsibility of educators throughout the world by their methods, programs, and personalities to foster in every boy and girl their inherent creative voices for the sake of the best possible future for all?